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Governing Global Religions in China

Introduction

As a global studies major politics, history, and religion have all been major components of my undergraduate coursework. Considering China's status as one of the few remaining authoritative communist governments left in the world; its long, colorful history; as well as the presence of both Eastern and Western religions in this country; China provides a most unique setting for a study of the interaction between government and religion. The global studies major has instilled in me a very global outlook. My studies have focused on global trends and phenomena; thus despite the presence of five official religions in China (Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Daoism, and Islam) and numerous unofficial, I have chosen to focus my research on the three major global religions in China: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.¹

Of course even after narrowing my research to these three global religions, providing a thorough analysis of their influence from and upon the Chinese government is still quite daunting. My approach to this task is four-fold and thus my paper is arranged accordingly:

I first examine the present status of these three religions in China one by one. I examine the government's policies towards each religion and the impact these policies have upon the actual practice of the religion itself. My second step is a survey of Chinese

religious and political history, providing the history of the relationship between religion and government in China. The third step is an investigation of the recent and current political factors in China which have a strong relationship with religion and religious policy.

In the fourth and concluding section of my research I use the perspective gained from studying Chinese religious and political history as well recent Chinese politics to explain the current status of these religions. In other words in the concluding section four, I use the understanding gained from sections two and three to help explain section one. When choosing this research project aside from seeking a greater understanding of the current religious situation in China, a major research goal of mine was to discover if there are any discrepancies in the policies of the Chinese government towards different religions. Hence, a substantial portion of the concluding section will be dedicated to this issue.

Section 1

Introduction

“Citizens of the PRC (People’s Republic of China) enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may anyone discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in any religion.”²

Religious freedom is a fundamental right of the Chinese people, guaranteed to them by their government. Their own constitution clearly lays this out for them in Article 36. Why then is the Chinese government frequently attacked by international human rights organizations and the U.S. State Department for violations of religious freedom?

“The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.”³

While guaranteeing the freedom of religion, Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution places tight restrictions on religious practice at the same time. The freedom of religion is guaranteed only to “normal” religious activities. But what constitutes normal? The constitution fails to spell this out. Thus the government is given complete freedom in defining normal religious activities.

Furthermore, all religious activities must be registered and approved by the government. Once registered, all religious activities must be administered by officials who have been approved by the government, conducted at a location approved by the government, and held at meeting times approved by the government. Any activities failing to meet these requirements are not protected by law.

In fact, the government’s control actually extends into the conduction of religious services, doctrinal beliefs held and taught, the publication and distribution of materials for worship and training, and interaction with foreigners. “Political authorities impose boundaries for acceptable religious doctrines, denouncing beliefs that emphasize evangelism, supernaturalism, or salvational doctrines that challenge the government’s religious policies or contradict projected symbolic order, which depicts all of Chinese society as unified under Chinese Communist Party rule.”⁴

In practice, the government decides exactly what these restrictions are, as well as how and when to enforce them. In other words, religion is permitted in China, but only

on the government's terms. As demonstrated by their most recent constitution of 1982 the Chinese government's policy on religion is a paradox, often filled with contradictions and puzzles. The official and unofficial enforcement of these controls over religion have differed greatly over time and province to province.

Buddhism

A Traditional Chinese Religion

Whereas Christianity and Islam are both viewed by most Chinese as foreign religions and in many ways "anti-China" or at least "un-Chinese," Buddhism is viewed by Chinese people as a traditional Chinese religion. When I first began my research of religion in China I was often perplexed by this view. Buddhism is clearly not native to China, as it originated in India and did not enter China until the 1st century A.D.⁵ The original writings of this religion were transcribed in the Indian language of Sanskrit, a language very foreign to Chinese. Yet despite these facts, the Chinese still view Buddhism as being their own. After living in China for more than one year having visited many Buddhist sights, informally interviewed Buddhist layman and believers, and from numerous readings I have gained a clear understanding of this view.

The major reason for this view is Buddhism's adoption of Chinese culture and philosophy after entering China. China's culture and philosophy are distinct and self-centric, easily and often clashing with foreign cultures and philosophies. Rather than attempting to impose the local culture and philosophy of origin (in this case India), Buddhism adjusted itself to Chinese culture and philosophy. After entering China Buddhism allowed for the worship of deities from China's numerous local indigenous religions as well as China's one actual official native religion—Daoism.⁶ Aside from

adopting some of the same deities, Buddhism adopted some of the same religious terms (often using Daoist terms and concepts to express Buddhist ideas), ceremonies, and practices as Daoism and local indigenous religions.⁷ In fact, today these two religions are often intermingled and confused with practitioners themselves unable to separate the two.

Another major contributing factor is the compatibility of Buddhism with Chinese culture and philosophy. A major similarity Buddhism shared with Daoism and native religions even before entering China was a belief in polytheism. Buddhism calls for the worship of countless supernatural beings each with their own realm of influence and ability to answer petitions for certain issues. As Daoism and the vast majority of Chinese local religions also require the worship of various deities, this is a very strong connection bridging these religions. Buddhism was able to absorb many of these Taoist and local deities and combine many of them with Buddhist deities. Thus, embracing Buddhism had great appeal to many Chinese who already believed in Daoism or local religion. Not only could they keep their own deities and the perceived benefits received from them, but at the same time gain Buddhist deities and their blessings as well. A mono-theistic religion, however, would not have such an appeal as it would require a complete separation from one's former religion and deities.

Aside from a shared belief in polytheism Buddhism and Daoism share a very key philosophical view. They share the belief that man is not naturally evil and incapable of good without divine intervention. Rather, they both teach that man is basically good but often engages in immoral behavior due to desire and other evils. Both of these religions focus on how man can overcome evil and improve himself through cultivation, meditation, and the performance of certain rituals and ceremonies. On the other hand

Christianity and Islam both teach that man is naturally bad and that only through divine help can he overcome evil.

More similarities can be seen in the actual ordinances and practices of Buddhism, Daoism, and other local Chinese religions. None of these religions are well organized with regular scheduled meeting times or well developed communication networks. They are more personal religions in which the believer makes prayers or burns incense at home in private, or comes to a temple to make offerings in times of special need or holidays or participates in a special ceremony performed by laypeople.⁸ These religions also involve the worshipping of idols, burning of incense, and a layman force consisting of monks. These characteristics are all very similar and in sharp contrast to both Christianity and Islam.

Due to the aforementioned accommodation of Buddhism to traditional Chinese culture and philosophy, Buddhism in China has taken on its own form and developed characteristics different from Buddhism in other locations. This is even more true for the practice of Buddhism in the area of Tibet. The practice of Buddhism in this region is so unique that it is labeled as its own separate branch of Buddhism (Tibetan Buddhism) in contrast to Han Buddhism as practiced in the other areas of China. Tibetan Buddhism uses its own unique language, worships some separate deities, and is more organized having a spiritual/ political leader known as the Dalai Lama. As a result of the unique development of Buddhism in China in which Buddhism has been highly "Sinicized," the Chinese people have developed the view that Buddhism is their own traditional religion.⁹

Relationship with Government

Of the three religions surveyed, Buddhism is by far given the best treatment by the Chinese government. As with the other religions in China, Buddhism also is overseen by the government and organized into a “Patriotic” organization referred to in English as the Chinese Buddhist Association or CBA. Despite also being supervised by the government the private nature and lack of regular meetings of the religion prohibits the government from having a major effect on the daily practice of practitioners. What effect the government does have on Buddhism in China is largely very positive.

While not officially promoting or endorsing any religions (aside from recognizing five religions as legal), the Chinese government in practice does just the opposite. The Chinese government supposedly is a dual structure government with the Communist Party and government officials working side by side. In reality, however, China is a one-party government. Most government officials are Communist party members. Non-Communist government officials are typically given symbolic positions with little real power. Thus, the leaders in the Chinese government with the actual power and influence are Communist Party members.

One of the requirements for being a Communist party member is denying the belief in any religion and embracing the atheistic philosophy of Marxism. While never announced publicly, in practice there seems to be a special exception to this rule made for those who believe in Buddhism. While party members are not allowed to embrace Christianity or Islam in any public way, party members who embrace Buddhism are often left untouched.

One of the most obvious signs of government endorsement of Buddhism can be seen by examining government supported tourism in China. Many Buddhists holy sights, particularly temples and mountains, are major tourist destinations in China. Some of these sights are financially sponsored by Chinese government agencies. These locations are not only marketed by government controlled media but also highly funded by the government. The government assumes responsibility for the maintenance of these sights as well as construction projects.

This interaction between the government, Buddhism, and tourism has greatly impacted the Buddhist monastic economy. Before the 1949 takeover by the current Communist government Buddhist temples and monks were mostly self-supported by large landholdings. Since that time they have become dependent upon lay donors, the performance of rituals, government agencies, and gate ticket/ tourist revenues. Much of the funding provided by government agencies is tied to promoting tourism in the region which in turn provides the government with revenues. Thus, temples are left mostly relying on rituals fees and tourist revenue for their income. This has led to a great struggle to retain autonomy and purity in the face of commercialization for Chinese Buddhists.¹⁰

As a result of being viewed as being a truly traditional Chinese religion, receiving beneficial treatment from the government, as well as its connection to most of China's most famous landmarks; Buddhism has become vastly popular in China, claiming more than 100 million adherents, making it the number one religion in China. However, as with most religious statistics in China, this estimate is not very reliable. Classifying and

recognizing Buddhist adherents and laypeople is not a simple task due to the previously stated private nature of this religion.¹¹

Governing Tibet

While the relationship between Buddhism and the Chinese government has been overly positive with Chinese Buddhists receiving many benefits, there is one aspect of their relationship which is very sensitive for the Chinese government. That issue is the sovereignty of Tibet. Many adherents of Tibetan Buddhism believe that the Dalai Lama (who currently leads the exiled Tibetan government from Dharamshala, India) is the spiritual and political leader of Tibet, and that Tibet should be independent from China. As the Chinese government is extremely concerned and consumed with maintaining its territorial borders and regaining control over Taiwan, independent movements in any form are strongly and swiftly opposed. Thus, the Chinese government has kept a watchful eye over Tibet and taken measures to maintain control over the region.

The Chinese government has placed special travel restrictions on Tibet allowing itself to control who has access to this area. All foreigners, especially foreign media, must obtain a special visa and receive government approval to enter this province. Even after entering Tibet foreigners are restricted in where they may go and must be accompanied by Chinese. Another control mechanism employed by the government is population control. One of the themes of claims for Tibetan independence is their different ethnicity and language. To combat these claims the government offers economic incentives to ethnic Han Chinese to move into the province, decreasing the percentage of ethnic and language minorities in the region. Another method has been through the education system. As Tibetan children are taught Chinese in school and their admission to university

dependent upon their master of Chinese as well as some level of proficiency in English, their native Tibetan language is become less and less useful for them.

Another facet of Chinese government policy on controlling Tibet is maintaining criticism of the Dalai Lama. The Beijing government frequently criticizes his government in exile, his supporters, as well as strongly condemns foreign leaders who recognize him in both domestic and international media channels. He is portrayed as being a threat to the stability, peace, unity, and development of Tibet and all of China.¹²

Aside from criticizing and verbally attacking the Dalai Lama, the Chinese government has also sought to interfere with the selection process of the Dalai Lama. The selection process for the Dalai Lama as well as the number two most powerful spiritual/political Tibetan Buddhism figure the Panchen Lama consists of a search and nomination phase conducted by a series of esoteric tests then narrowed down with the final selection coming from the drawing of lots from a golden urn. Traditionally this process is carried out by several Traditional Tibetan Buddhists senior monks. The Dalai Lama has a major influence on the selection of the Panchen Lama, and the Panchen Lama also has a major say in the selection of the Dalai Lama. In 1989 the 10th Panchen Lama died and six years later the Dalai Lama named a young child as the successor. This boy was soon arrested by the Chinese government who then appointed its own candidate to the position. In 2007 the Chinese government claimed the right to approve all lama appointments, including the appointment of the next Dalai Lama.¹³

These measures have not all been received passively. Many Tibetans are still very opposed to the Chinese presence in Tibet and still desire independence. Some Tibetans still view the Dalai Llama as not only their spiritual leader, but their political leader as

well. This was clearly demonstrated during the March 2008 protests in Lhasa and other locations in China. These demonstrations were represented by the Chinese government as being orchestrated by the Dalai Llama and his supporters in an attempt to gain international support for their cause in advance of the Beijing Olympics, undermine the peace and development of Tibet, as well as sully the Olympics.¹⁴

Buddhism has become entrenched in and intertwined with Chinese society and culture. It claims the largest number of adherents of any religion in China and has an overly good relationship with the government. Nonetheless, governing Tibetan Buddhism continues to be a large struggle for the Chinese government, and seems likely to remain so in the foreseeable future.

Christianity

Introduction

The size of the Christian population in China is enormous,¹⁵ 17-20 million by modest Chinese official estimations for churches registered with the government.¹⁶ These numbers do not include any children under the age of 18, church goers who have not officially joined the church, or the millions of believers who meet in unregistered house churches. Outside estimations accounting for unregistered or “house churches” are much larger, ranging from 60 million to greater than 100 million. Reliable numbers, however, are impossible to gather, as the vast majority of churches in China are unregistered and do not keep official membership records. Even official statistics gathered by the Chinese government are questionable as the government has incentives to manipulate the data and keep the known number of Christians artificially lower. Nonetheless, China very likely already possesses the third largest Christian population in the world (when combining

Catholic and Protestant numbers, China is likely ranked second among Protestant populations and much lower among Catholics), trailing only the United States and Brazil.¹⁷

Christianity is rumored to have been first introduced to China by St. Thomas in the 1st Century AD; however the first authenticated introduction of some form of Christianity came in the 7th Century by the Nestorians. Over the next thousand years various groups of Christians and Catholics entered China, but the number of Chinese Christians remained very small until the arrival of Protestant missionaries in the early 1800s. The number steadily grew over the next century and continued to grow until the establishment of the current Communist government in 1949.¹⁸

Under Communism

Despite being openly atheistic and banning party members from holding any religious beliefs, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at first did not openly seek to abolish religion. It did, however, return to the old model used for centuries by Chinese dynasties of controlling and monitoring religion. "The new government not only registered and monitored Protestant and other religious believers, as dynastic regimes had done, but also systematically reduced the influence of religion in society."¹⁹

The control apparatus to monitor and control religion was implemented with the establishment of the Religious Affairs Bureau in 1951. This bureau allowed for five official religions in China all to be supervised by the government: Buddhism, Taoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam. Under the Religious Affairs Bureau, organizations were formed for each religion and labeled as "patriotic" religious organizations. Each patriotic organization would supervise and monitor its own religion and ensure practice

was kept within acceptable bounds. Protestant Christianity was to be monitored by the Protestant Three Self Movement (TSPM) whose main purpose was to sever all relations with Western missions.

Not only did these organizations regulate religious activity actively, but they also aggressively sought to destroy the autonomy and reduce the influence of religious groups and communities. In fact, this government exceeded control levels over religion demonstrated by most pre- 1949 ruling regimes. During Mao's Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966, all churches, temples, monasteries, and venues for any kind of religious activity were closed for more than a decade. Religion was officially and effectively abolished, surpassing anything attempted by the monitoring devices of dynastic or republican regimes in the pre-Communist era. Left with no practical purpose, organizations such as the Religious Affairs Bureau and the patriotic religious organizations were abolished.²⁰

With Mao's death in 1976 the Cultural Revolution came to an end, ushering in the reformist era which soon began with the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Under Deng's leadership Maoist controls were loosened as the state backed away from a radical stance of eliminating religion and returned to the more historically familiar policy of registration and monitoring. Official religious life was resumed with the resurrection of both the Religious Affairs Bureau and the patriotic religious organizations. Due to its active role in the radical Mao-era political campaigns, the TSPM lost much of its legitimacy. As a result, an additional Protestant organization, the China Christian Council, was created to work alongside the TSPM, to handle church management and ecclesiastical affairs. The Religious Affairs Bureau and the officially authorized religious organizations continue

today to constitute what are in many ways the equivalent of the old imperial devices of monitoring and control that existed for centuries.

After the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, Christianity in China has witnessed rapid growth. In 1976 at the end of the Cultural Revolution there were no open churches in China. In 2006 there were 50,000 government-registered Protestant churches and meeting points. This growth in the registered Three-Self Government operated churches alone is astounding; yet, it has been vastly overshadowed by the proliferation of unregistered house churches.

Home-Grown Christians

The fundamentalist doctrine endorsed by the majority of Chinese Christians teaches separation between the church and state, headship of the Church by Christ alone (in other words accountability to God rather than government or man), emphasizes salvation by grace through faith in Christ, focuses on Biblical prophecy, the supernatural, the deity of Jesus Christ, militant evangelism, indoctrination of children, and the appointment of church leadership according to spiritual qualifications and abilities. All of these teachings are in direct conflict with government regulations on religion. Thus most beliefs held by the majority of Chinese Christians are incompatible with the doctrines of the government operated Three-Self churches.

Mainstream TSPM churches are ran and headed by the government, require political study for church leaders, teach a liberal theology, discourage personal evangelism, prohibit the indoctrination of children, place restrictions on topics for preaching and teaching, and appoint church leadership that is supportive of and submissive to the Communist Party. These conflicts coupled with the leadership of the

TSPM and the Religious Affairs Bureau being Communist Party supporters, many of them party members and ardent atheists, has led to a strong distrust of TSPM churches among informed and educated Chinese Christians.²¹ This distrust has helped fuel the rapid spread of unofficial house churches.

Christian Phobia

In sharp contrast to the positively-viewed “traditional” religion of Buddhism, Christianity is perhaps the most negatively viewed religion by the Chinese government. Despite its presence for more than 1,000 years in China, Christianity continues to be seen as a foreign religion and struggles to escape an association with Western imperialism. The reasons for this association will be explored in section two of this paper. The relationship between Christianity and the Chinese government is most antagonistic and the largest source of international criticism of Chinese government human right abuses.

Also in contrast to Buddhism, Christianity is a highly organized religion in which believers are organized into a local church which has weekly meetings, a hierarchy of leadership, and most importantly a strong philosophy which commands loyalty and often has political implications.

This philosophy promoted by Christianity covers every aspect of life and the political process, providing adherents with strong views on every issue (from abortion rights, homosexual marriage, the death penalty, to the economy, welfare, and even war). Thus, many Christians are very active in politics and have a large influence on the political affairs of their respective nation. As Christianity was introduced to China mostly by Western missionaries, the Chinese continue to associate this religion with the West, despite its actual origins in the Middle East. Observing the political process in Western

democracies has greatly fueled the Chinese government's fears of Christianity. Christian groups are political juggernauts in the U.S. and many European democracies, exerting immense political power. The entire goal of the Chinese government's religious policy is to maintain a monopoly over political power and keep all opposition at bay. Thus, the political power of Christian groups that is demonstrated in western countries greatly contributes to the CCP's fears of Christianity.

Further fueling such fears was Christianity's active role in bringing about the collapse of Eastern Europe's communist governments. Catholicism was at the heart of the Polish Solidarity Movement which overthrew their communist government, and church groups played a key role in East Germany's "revolution of the candles," which overturned their atheistic communist government.²² Religion already has a well established connection with rebellion and separatist movements in both current-day China (as the previously mentioned Tibet situation and to be mentioned later with Islamic separatist movements in Xinjiang) and historical China as well (to be explored in section two). Modern cases of political rebellion in other countries fueled by Christianity only reinforce the communist party's already established fears of Christianity in China.

Perhaps the biggest issue involved is one of loyalty. In order to maintain its power the communist party must command the complete loyalty of its people. With registered and unregistered church member estimates combined reaching around 80 million; the number of Christians in China is possibly greater than the number of Chinese Communist Party members (over 73 million).²³ The potential political power of such a large number of Chinese Christians, with an ever increasing growth rate, is very threatening to the

Communist Party. This has led the Chinese Government to use extra controls over Christianity, particularly over the aforementioned unregistered “house churches”.

Tools of Control and Repression

In the Three-self churches government regulations touch on virtually every aspect of religious life, including sermon contents, prohibitions against providing religious instruction to children under the age of eighteen or endorsing followers to listen to overseas religious broadcasts, the qualifications and duties of clergy, and even the conduction of religious services. In addition, the government requires a “three-designates” policy: a fixed location for worship, a permanent responsible leader, and activities restricted to a given geographic area. Regulations prohibit religious activities from hindering production, endangering the social order, or “affecting the work, studies, and life of resident.”²⁴ Such ambiguous and vague prohibitions allow political authorities to monitor and persecute religious activities as they deem fit.

The Religions Affairs Bureau not only must approve meet times and locations, but even chooses leadership in the church and the content of their sermons. As these churches are operated by the government, accordingly their budgets are funded by the government as well, giving the government even more control over church workers. The government, not Christian congregations, has complete power in appointing church officials and administrators. In some cases even non-Christian party-loyalists are appointed as ministers in spite of protests from the church membership.²⁵

Thus, as mentioned previously, many Christian groups choose to have unregistered meetings to avoid such regulations. To avoid government detection gatherings are often very small and held in the home of one of the believers (thus the

name “house churches”) or a home rented specifically for the purpose of hosting meetings.²⁶

The degree of freedom exhibited by these unregistered house churches differs greatly province to province and locality to locality. House churches are generally permitted to operate so long as they keep their numbers low (typically anywhere from 20-50 depending on the location) and stay out of the public’s attention. In most areas of China even if detected by the local government, abiding by these two principles keeps the meetings from being interrupted. In more politically sensitive areas such as Beijing and Shanghai this is not always the case, as any unregistered Christian meetings may face harsh retribution.²⁷

Workers in Three-Self churches who do not comply with the government and house church members who attract the attention of the government may be exposed to various degree of punishment. Some simply face verbal reprimands from the local police or government officials and often verbal threats if their actions continue. Often, however, the reprisals are much more severe involving physical harassment, damage to personal property, fines, detention, labour re-education, or even criminal proceedings and indefinite imprisonments.²⁸

An additional tool of the Chinese government to control Christianity is the banning of foreign printed Christian material as well as foreign produced audio-visual Christian material. As the Bureau for Religious Affairs controls what religious material is made in China and foreign materials are all banned, this gives the government complete control over what information is disseminated about Christianity. As a global religion which places an emphasis on evangelism, Christians heavily rely on written material and,

in recent years, audio-visual material to spread their message. Having control over this material is a very powerful tool for the Chinese government.

A final control mechanism worth mentioning is the limitations placed on interacting with foreign Christians. The only influential Christian education system in China's history was established by Protestant missionaries in the 19th Century. These Christian schools were all closed down or converted into regular schools after the Communist takeover. Since then the government has opened a few Christian Universities, but with very limited enrollment. Considering these circumstances, combined with the ban on foreign printed Christian material, there is a large lack of Christian education in China. Thus, not only many Chinese Christian congregants, but even church leaders are untrained, uneducated, and even ignorant of basic Christian doctrines.

Foreign Christians and Christian organizations based in countries without such restrictions are capable of traveling to China and training Chinese Christians and assisting in the development of a Christian education. Financially powerful foreign Christian organizations are also capable and willing to providing funding to Chinese Christians. Nevertheless, the Chinese government restricts foreign financial support for Chinese churches as it stresses self-support and bans foreigners from leading and even preaching at Chinese religious services (with the exception being made for foreigners having an invitation to do so by a provincial or national level religious body).²⁹

Despite a very negative history and a continuing struggle to escape a label as being a Western tool of imperialism, Christianity in China is large and ever growing. The relationship between Christianity and the Chinese Government is exceptionally negative. The Chinese Government greatly fears Christianity and has repressed and sought to

control Christianity more so than any other religion. Nonetheless, Christianity in China continues to grow and thrive, especially in the form of unregistered “house churches.”

Islam

An Ethnic Religion

Whereas Buddhism is viewed by most Chinese people as a traditional Chinese religion and Christianity is viewed as being an imperialistic foreign religion, Islam is in a category of its own. In China Islam is mostly confined to a geographical region of China, the northwestern province of Xinjiang, and to ethnic minority groups. Thus, most Chinese do not necessarily view Islam as a foreign religion, but as being a religion for ethnic minorities.

Islam first entered China in the 7th century with Arabic traders traveling along the Silk Road. Over the next several centuries trade between the Tang and Song Dynasties with Persia and other Arabic countries continuously expanded, both along the Silk Road and by sea as well. This trade brought many Arabic and Persian merchants to China, some of them settling permanently. Their goals for settling in China were mostly restricted to commercial interests rather than proselytization, thus Islam spread very slowly at this time, with the only growth coming through birth and intermarriage with Chinese women. It was not until the arrival of Genghis Khan and the establishment of the Yuan or Mongolian Dynasty in China that Islam really spread in China.³⁰

The vast empire conquered by Genghis Khan and his descendants spanned nearly all of Asia, including many Arabic, Persian, and Central Asian lands which are mostly populated by Muslims. Many of these Arabic, Persian, and Central Asian Muslims joined the Mongolian army as soldiers or craftsman and participated in campaigns in China.

After these campaigns many of them settled in China, particularly in western regions. In fact, many population migrations took place during the rule of this dynasty, bringing large populations of people from Central Asia into what today is considered mainland China.³¹

The Yuan dynasty rulers adopted a policy of tolerance towards all religions, and some even embraced Islam as their own religion. The social position of Muslims was greatly elevated as Muslims were treated as the second highest class in the Yuan Dynasty (behind native Mongolians and outranking the Han Chinese). Their political and economic statuses were both elevated at this time as well as they were given priority government positions and favorable taxes from the government. This influx of Muslim migrants coupled with the policy of religious tolerance and even privilege contributed greatly to the spread and development of Islam in China.³²

The Yuan Dynasty was replaced by the Ming Dynasty in the 14th Century. The Ming Dynasty was not as kind to Muslims as the Yuan Dynasty had been, and many of the gains made by Islam during the Yuan Dynasty were lost. The political, social, and economic privileges previously awarded to Muslims were all removed, and the Ming dynasty adopted a policy that would shape the future of Islam in China: national assimilation and racial intermarriage restrictions.³³

Up until the Ming Dynasty, Muslims were still greatly scattered all throughout China. They were living in very small concentrations dispersed all over the Chinese population. Ming Dynasty national assimilation policies brought the dispersed Muslims and other minority groups together to form new communities with similar features, values, and customs. The formation of these communities led to an intermingling of races,

languages, and cultures which eventually developed into several new Islam-embracing ethnic minority groups. Ten of these Islam-embracing minority ethnic groups are officially recognized by China today: Uighurs, Huis, Tatars, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Khalkas, Kazaks, Salas, Bao'ans, and Dongxiangs. These groups mostly settled in the Western regions of China: Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, Yunnan, and especially Xinjiang. Considerable Muslim populations can also be found in Henan, Hebei, Shaanxi, and Shandong.³⁴

Today the population of these ten ethnic groups numbers over 20 million; yet, the estimation for the number of Chinese Muslims is the same as few Chinese people outside of these ethnic groups embrace Islam. While Islam is often sighted as the fastest growing religion in the world, this growth comes from birth and intermarriage rather than from proselytization and conversion. The growth of Islam in China has followed this trend closely.³⁵ Thus, Islam in China has become strongly associated with ethnicity and heritage.

Accommodations

As with Buddhism, the linguistic, cultural, and philosophical background of Islam are all quite different from the ancient traditions of China derived from Confucianism and Daoism. With Islam, however, the differences are more severely pronounced. Thus, in order to maintain an existence in China Islam has made numerous accommodations throughout its history in China.

Throughout its existence in China Islam encountered many hindrances and found itself in many ways incompatible with the Chinese. Of course a major issue initially was the foreign concepts and philosophies of this religion. As previously mentioned the local

religions of China as well as Buddhism are all pluralistic religions, whereas Islam is monotheistic. Language was also a very key issue. Not only are the scriptures of Islam-- the Koran-- written in Arabic, but Arabic is elevated as a holy language in the religion of Islam, even non-Arabic speakers are required to conduct prayers in Arabic. Naturally, such a requirement held little appeal to non-native Arabic speakers.

Later the issues compounded as the family-based Islamic Education System became inadequate, and Islam faced a growing challenge from the revitalization of traditional Chinese culture and Confucian philosophy as well as the resurrection of Daoism and Buddhism. These obstacles pressured Chinese Muslims to seek changes.

To cope with the language problem a Chinese translation of the Koran was accomplished during the Ming Dynasty. At this time the Chinese Muslim leaders also revolutionized their education system by developing an organized, systematic, mosque-based education system. To meet the challenges from traditional Chinese culture and Confucian philosophy Islam adapted itself. Chinese Muslim scholars familiarized themselves with Confucianism, borrowed some thoughts and philosophies from both Confucianism and Buddhism, found ways to use Confucian thought to justify Islam, to show the compatibilities between Muslim thought and Confucian thought as well as to criticize Confucianism. Muslim scholars also used their knowledge of Confucianism to debate with Buddhists and Taoists. In a further act of accommodation, Chinese Muslims adjusted their holidays and calendars to make them more compatible with Chinese holidays.³⁶

These adjustments strengthened the position of Islam and assisted in the assimilation of this religion to China. Yet, it is the philosophical differences between

Islam and traditional Chinese philosophy that presented and continues to present one of the largest problems. As with Christianity Islam is often a very political religion.

Buddhism focuses on the moral conduct and self-improvement of the individual, but has little concern for politics, economics, and social issues. The doctrines and philosophies of Islam, on the other hand, have many social, economic, and political implications for its followers. Islam even has a comprehensive code or set of laws covering every aspect of life derived from the Koran known as Shari'ah. In fact, most states with majority Muslim populations adopt Shari'ah as their national law, making Islam the official state religion. Thus, Islam creates a very strong identity for its adherents, and Chinese Muslims are no exception. Indeed, identity for Chinese Muslims is even more pronounced for multiple reasons and has several significant political implications.

Identity and Independence

In China Muslims have an identity very distinct from other Chinese. As previously stated the overwhelming majority of Chinese Muslims are not Han Chinese who constitute 92% of the Chinese population, but rather ethnic minorities.³⁷ These minorities have their own languages (most being Turkic dialects), customs, holidays, and physical characteristics all separate from other Chinese. A second factor distinguishing them from the majority of the Chinese population is obviously their religion. This factor is quite significant when considering the previously discussed social, economic, and political implications of Islamic philosophy. The third major factor of the Chinese Muslim identity is geography.

More than 10 million of China's 20 million Muslims are concentrated in Xinjiang province which shares a border with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghiziastan, Tajikistan,

Pakistan, Mongolia, India, and Afghanistan. This province has historically been inhabited by non-Han Chinese populations. In fact, in 1949 when the Communists took over China and occupied Xinjiang 90% of the population was ethnic Uighur, with only 5% of the population being ethnically Han Chinese.³⁸

This area also has a history of independence, however concise it may be. During the mid-eighteenth century the Uighurs established their own kingdom in this region which nearly lasted a century. Also, before the Communists came to power in 1949, Uighur nationalists twice seceded from China and established an independent nation called the Eastern Turkestan Republic, from 1931 to 1934 and from 1944 to 1949.³⁹

As a result of such a distinct and well-defined identity with ethnic, language, cultural, social, religious, and even geographical and historical ties, many Muslims, especially Uighur in the Xinjiang area, have developed a desire for independence, or at least greater autonomy.

After the official annexation of Xinjiang by Communist China in 1955 Uighur groups formed separatists movements and sought for independence from Beijing. Some of these movements have been peaceful; others have turned violent through bombings, riots, and political assassinations. The use of violence and protest became increasingly rampant during the 1990s. During this decade more than two thousand acts of recorded violence occurred in Xinjiang province alone.⁴⁰ The largest and most famous separatist organization is the ETIM, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement. Thus, Beijing has found governing Islam, and especially Xinjiang to be no easy task.

Governing Islam

As with Buddhism and Christianity, Islam also is overseen by the government and organized into a “Patriotic” organization referred to in English as the Chinese Islamic Association. Mosques are under the government’s authority and mosque leaders known as imam-hatybs are appointed by the state. Islamic literature is strictly controlled and Muslim children are especially targeted for government controls. As previously mentioned Islam is mostly spread biologically through marriage and birth rather than through conversion. Accordingly, a key to preventing or at least slowing the growth of Islam is to inhibit the transfer of this religion from parent to child. This appears to be the thought of the Chinese government as reflected in several of their policies.

The Chinese government strictly enforces its prohibition on the religious education of children under the age of 18 towards Muslims. Anyone under the age of 18 is banned from entering a mosque. Muslim girls are prevented from wearing a hijab (a traditional scarf worn by Muslim women that leaves only the face uncovered) to school, and Muslim students are prevented by their schools from fasting during the month of Ramadan (in which all Muslims are required to fast during the daytime everyday for the entire month).⁴¹ Government controls are especially tight in Xinjiang Province.

The heavy concentration of Muslims in this area coupled with the presence of separatist movements has led the Chinese government to enact even greater and more extensive control mechanisms in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. As with Tibet, but perhaps to an even greater extent here, the Chinese government has strongly promoted the migration of Han Chinese into this region. The government-promoted

migration of Han Chinese into these Western regions of China is one part of the “Great Western Development Program.”

The disparity between China’s highly developed and heavily populated eastern coastal regions and under-populated and under-developed western areas is striking. The six provinces, five autonomous regions, and one municipality targeted by this project contain over 70% of China’s area, yet only account for less than 30% of China’s population and less than 20% of China’s total economic output. The central government views the underdevelopment of the west, particularly Xinjiang and Tibet as great contributors to the unrest and desire for independence in these two provinces. Developing these regions is key to promoting stability. Thus, in 2000 the “Great Western Development Program” was initiated to this issue.

This development program has entailed massive Central Government investment increases, infrastructure projects, efforts on ecological protection, promotion of education, and a wide-range of favorable economic policies. Another aspect of this project is human resource development. Accompanying the economic growth created by this project is a need for qualified personnel, especially in science, technology, and management fields. As Xinjiang is lacking in such human resources, the Chinese government has enacted several policies to attract Han Chinese from the eastern regions of China to come to Xinjiang. High wages, housing, waived residency requirements, and various other perks have all been offered to qualified Han Chinese who will relocate to this area. Coastal populations, particularly universities, have been targeted by recruitment campaigns to participate in this program.⁴²

This program has already brought noticeable economic gains to the region as well as a large influx of migrants from China's eastern regions. As previously stated in 1949 when the Communists took over China and occupied Xinjiang 90% of the population was ethnic Uighur, with only 5% of the population being ethnically Han Chinese. Today, Han Chinese account for nearly 40% of the population, revealing large Han population migrations the past half century, particularly this past decade.⁴³

The "Great Western Development Project" has brought many economic gains to China's western regions. Xinjiang in particular has greatly benefited from this boom and rapidly boosted living standards. The local population, however, claims few of the gains have benefited the Muslim population, but rather have benefited the Han immigrants. This in turn has led to even greater ethnic tensions between the groups. Also, the influx of non-Uighur language speaking Han Chinese has created conflicts over language, as local Uighurs expect the Han Chinese to speak their own Turkic-based language, and the Han Chinese expect the Uighur to speak Mandarin. The Uighurs feel especially threatened as Mandarin is given a clear preference over their native tongue by the education system as well as the job market. Inter-marriage between Uighurs and Han Chinese is very rare, and the two ethnicities remain highly segregated.

Just as with Tibet the central government has placed tight controls over media in Xinjiang. Reports on Xinjiang by Chinese are carefully filtered and monitored, while reports by foreign reporters are even more strictly scrutinized and require government approval. In fact, the government even restricts foreign media access to the region as foreign media representatives are required to obtain permission before entering Xinjiang.

A crucial aspect of governing Xinjiang for the Chinese government is eliminating Islamic separatist groups. These groups are viewed by the government as the greatest threat to stability in the region. As mentioned earlier, separatist groups such as the ETIM, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, have been advocating for Xinjiang independence ever since the annexation of Xinjiang in 1955. The last two decades have brought a rise in the activities of these groups. This increase is likely a response to the aforementioned increased ethnic tensions caused by recent government policies as well as the formation of several Turkic states in Central Asia. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the creation of several Turkic states in Central Asia (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), providing secessionists in Xinjiang with great hope of independence for themselves.

Groups such as the ETIM have sought independence through protests and petitions; developed extensive international networks (especially online), lobbied international bodies to support their cause, and in some cases turned to violence through bombings and political assassinations. The Chinese government's response to these groups has been one of zero-tolerance. Any form of dissent or unregistered political activity in the region has been harshly and systematically suppressed through arrest and imprisonment. Large security forces have been placed in this region and capital punishment is frequently and speedily employed to deal with dissidents. In fact, according to amnesty international Xinjiang province averages 1.8 executions per week, one of the highest execution rates in the world.

On the Sunny Side

While the Chinese government does govern Muslims and especially the province of Xinjiang with a tight hand, there are certainly some positive sides to this relationship as well. As previously mentioned, in recent years the Chinese government has invested a lot of money in its Western provinces, especially Xinjiang. As a result, this province has developed rapidly during the past two decades. While the influx of Han Chinese into the region; the conduction of university entrance exams in Mandarin; as well as the Mandarin-speaking requirement of all decent jobs have all diminished the importance of the Uighur and other Muslim minority group languages, the Chinese government has allowed for and even supported the continuance of ethnic language instruction.

The Chinese government has also respected the strict dietary restrictions of Muslims as the Chinese military and public schools have accommodated soldiers and students with Muslim dining facilities. Universities and government agencies have enacted affirmative action policies reserving positions and lowering requirements for ethnic Muslims. According to the Chinese government ethnic Muslims have also been given partial exceptions from the one-child policy. These claims, however, have been strongly countered by many Uighur Muslims who claim that not only has the one-child policy been applied to them, but it has been applied with brutal force, including coercive birth control and forced sterilizations.⁴⁴

Islam has a long history in China and a strong connection to ethnicity and identity. Its association with independence movements in the province of Xinjiang has led to a negative relationship with the Chinese government and the establishment of very strong controls over this religion. The importance of Chinese Muslims and the province of

Xinjiang to China both politically and economically creates a very complex and intricate relationship between this religion and government.

Section 2

History of Religion in China

Religion and Rebellion

Understanding the history of religion in China is a prerequisite to understanding the current state of affairs. Throughout the history of China religion has been linked with unrest and revolt, giving religion very negative political overtones. Thus, the history of religion in China has been accompanied by constant attempts by the government to control and marginalize it.

Historically, the Chinese political and social order has been based on the “mandate of heaven.”⁴⁵ Under this order, the ruler has complete power and demands complete loyalty from the people. There is no room under such a system for any other groups in society to offer salvation or command absolute loyalty. Thus, as popular religions in China have gained influence they have been met with strong opposition from the governing rulers. This has been demonstrated time and time again in Chinese history by various control mechanisms over religion, official crackdowns on religion, and attempts to remove religious groups. There has hardly been a Chinese political regime from the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) to the present that has not required a form of registration or licensing of religious groups or has not assumed the right to monitor and intervene in religious affairs. All groups outside the properly registered groups have frequently undergone official harassment and persecution. Persecution, in turn, has led to

popular uprisings. This relationship has “endowed China with an unparalleled history of religious-based political rebellion.”⁴⁶

A Rocky Start

The first major religious-based political rebellions in China occurred during the Han Dynasty in 184 AD. At this time two rebellions broke-out simultaneously: the Yellow Turban rebellion and the Five Pecks of Grain rebellion. The Yellow Turban rebellion broke out along the lower Yangtze River in Eastern China and the Five Pecks of Grain rebellion began in Sichuan Province. These rebellions can both be labeled as Taoist as they drew their inspiration from Taoist priests who stirred up impoverished peasants and aroused violent attacks against government officials who they blamed for their misery. These rebellions both led to great losses of life, but were eventually subdued and replaced by other movements.⁴⁷

In 751 A.D. Muslim armies defeated Chinese armies in Central Asia, gained control of the Silk Road, and threatened the Tang Dynasty. This provocation led to a disdain for all foreign religions and eventually an imperial decree against any religion considered “foreign.”⁴⁸

The next major religious rebellion occurred during the Song Dynasty from 1120-1121. This rebellion was known as the Fang La or Fang Xi rebellion, and occurred in the southeastern provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, and Anhui. This rebellion was created by tensions over government taxes and had connections to the Gnostic religion of Manichaeism (which entered China in the eighth century by Uighur merchants), some elements of Taoism and Buddhism, as well as sorcery and magic.⁴⁹ This rebellion forced

the Song government to dispatch more than 150,000 soldiers and led to a death total of approximately one million.⁵⁰

The following dynasty known as the Yuan or Mongolian Dynasty was overthrown by the Buddhist Red Turban Rebellion in the mid-fourteenth century. Hostility towards their Mongol conquerors combined with the anticipated coming of the future Buddha and establishment of a “pure land” (as taught by the Maitreya cult of the White Lotus Buddhist sect) inspired the Han Chinese to instigate this rebellion. The widely held anti-Mongol sentiments of the time allowed this rebellion to obtain adequate support and form a revolution which was successful in ousting the Mongols and founding the Ming Dynasty.⁵¹

The White Lotus Buddhist sect continued to inspire rebellions in China in the late eighteenth century. In 1774 Wang Lun who claimed to be the reincarnation of the Maitreya Buddha and the rightful Chinese Emperor led an armed rebellion in China’s eastern Shandong province. The rebellion was soon pacified, but only to see an even larger White Lotus Buddhist inspired rebellion transpire twenty years later in central China. This rebellion escalated for several years, gave the Qing military its first real challenge, and was not suppressed until 1804.⁵²

Fresh Memories

The 1800s and early part of the 1900s in China were characterized by western imperialism and large-scale domestic rebellions which were instrumental in shaping the present-day China. The early 1800s brought many Europeans to China in the form of traders, missionaries, and even opium smugglers. As trading balance between China and

Britain began to tilt significantly in China's favor, Britain encouraged the opium trade, despite strong opposition from the Qing government.

This conflict eventually led to the first Opium War in 1839, which resulted in China's defeat and the signing of the Treaty on Nanjing in 1842. This was the first of several treaties which the Chinese would be forced to sign with foreign nations over the next half-century later to become labeled as the "Unequal Treaties." These treaties followed humiliating military defeats and forced the Chinese government to pay large amounts of war reparations; open up ports and cities for trade, travel, and missionary activity; lease or cede territories; and provide special privileges to foreigners living in China.

Under these treaties Christianity gained a position of special privilege in China. Christianity could no longer be monitored by the Chinese government, missionaries were allowed to operate freely in China, and they were placed under the jurisdiction of their respective governments and exempted from the authority of the Chinese imperial government. As these treaties were imposed by Western countries through military power they were seen as the result of Western imperialism, and Christianity too, became associated with Western imperialism.⁵³

One result of such privilege was one of the most devastating revolts in history, the Taiping Rebellion from 1850-1864. A failed government official examinee, Hong Xiuquan, received a Christian gospel tract and somehow convinced himself that he was the younger brother of Jesus. He gained a following and founded the "Society of God-Worshippers" in southern China with its capital in Nanjing. After government repression, Hong launched a political rebellion to overthrow the Qing Dynasty which resulted in his

defeat, but only after the death of some 20 million Chinese. While the Taipings were not orthodox Christians by any means, their association with Christianity in the minds of the Chinese was very strong. This affair confirmed all the past experiences of the ruling dynasties with religious movements resulting in unrest, subversion, and rebellion. The image of Chinese Christians as being disloyal and rebellious and of foreign missionaries as promoting subversion was etched into the minds of the Chinese rulers and remains fresh today.⁵⁴

As the Taiping Rebellion was engrossing southern and central China, at the same time two major Muslim rebellions developed in western China. In 1856 the Panthay Rebellion broke-out in the southwestern province of Yunnan. The unfavorable discrimination to which the Muslim population of this region was subjected to by the Han Chinese and the ruling Manchu was the main cause of this rebellion. The Muslims held a majority of the population in this area at the time and were able to subdue the city of Dali in Yunnan and briefly establish an independent state. When this rebellion was finally vanquished in 1873, it had left a death total of more than 1 million in the province.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, in 1862 rebellion also broke-out in Northwest China in the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. In these regions a new mystic and radical form of Islam became popular which brought the Hui minority group into conflict with other Muslims and with the Han Chinese. This rebellion is referred to in many different terms some of which are the "Hui Minorities' War", the "Dungan Rebellion," and the "Muslim Rebellion." Taiping troop encroachments towards this region provoked the formation of both Han and Hui armies. This militarization motivated the Hui Muslims to seek to form

their own separate nation in Northwestern China. This conflict dragged on for years, leading to the death of more than 2 million before finally coming to an end in 1877.⁵⁶

From 1899-1901 the most recent major religious rebellion occurred, known as the Boxer Rebellion. This uprising was led by members of the Society of Right and Harmonious Fists, also referred to as the Spirit Boxers, against foreign influence in China. This group was a descendent of the White Lotus Buddhist sect which was linked to numerous rebellions in Chinese history. This group, however, rather than focusing on a millenarian return of the Maitreya Buddha, instead focused on simple ethical principles, practicing the physical exercise of boxing, as well as spiritual possession and healing.

The movement eventually became aimed at opposing foreigners, imperialism, and Christianity and became increasingly hostile and even violent towards Christians. The movement first gained power in the eastern province of Shandong and ultimately made its way to Beijing. More than two hundred foreign diplomats, missionaries, and other foreigners, thousands of Chinese Christian converts, and an unknown number of rebels and their sympathizers were killed during this siege on Beijing. Thousands more were killed in other parts of China.⁵⁷

As a response to the attack on the foreign legations in Beijing, eight foreign nations—Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Great Britain, and the United States—formed an alliance and sent troops to relieve the siege in Beijing. The eight nation alliance succeeded in quelling the rebellion, and then went on to punish the Qing government with over \$300 million USD in war reparations, and execute more than 50,000 Chinese civilians suspected of being involved in the Boxer movement.⁵⁸

The history of religion in China reveals much of the reason for the distrust of religion by today's government, the disdain for foreign missionaries, and explains the perceived need to control and monitor religion, and the fear of religious rebellion. The events in the late Qing Period (19th and early 20th centuries) gained Christianity a particularly bad reputation in China as stated rather candidly by Ryan Dunch in his account of Protestantism in Fuzhou:

“Christian preachers and converts were routinely vilified in the official discourse of the late Qing. Chinese officials, publicly at least, portrayed Christian converts as lowlifes and vagabonds who converted for personal gain, fomented trouble in local society, and tried to use their anomalous status under the treaties to impose upon decent people.”⁵⁹

During the Nationalistic period which followed the collapse of the Qing and preceded the founding of the current Communist state the attitude toward Christians and especially foreign missionaries was still rather bitter. One Nationalist writer expressed the prevailing attitude of the period when he wrote: “Christian missionaries have been described as the cultural arm of Western imperialism and stand accused of having denationalized many Chinese converts and having disintegrated both the body and spirit of the nation.”⁶⁰

China's turbulent history with religion has been especially emphasized by the current Communist regime. Today's history books, educational resources and programs, and government rhetoric all call attention to religion's association with rebellion in Chinese history as well as religion's ties to foreigners, especially foreign imperialism.

This negative history has been used by the Communist regime to justify the need to control and monitor religion in China.

Section 3

Relevant Political Factors

As demonstrated in section 2, China has a long history of religious rebellion which provides the modern Chinese government with a fear and distrust of religion. This historical relationship has been used by this government as a validation for controlling and monitoring religion. In addition to the very relevant historical factors, there are several present-day political factors which help provide an explanation for the current Chinese government's belief in a need for controlling and monitoring religion.

Political Monopoly

The first major factor is the political monopoly achieved by the Chinese Communist Government and their desire to maintain this monopoly. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rules the administration, judiciary, legislature, media, military, and police, giving the CCP thus has a complete monopoly over all political and social control mechanisms. There are no legal rivals or challenges to its leadership as the select few and insignificant non-communist political parties are merely satellites who may offer advice but have no share of ruling power. One of the only real potential rivals to the CCP is organized religion, which can compete with the party over ideological, organizational, and economic resources. The question remaining is why the CCP has chosen to control and monitor this potential rival of religion rather than completely wipe it out. The answer is two-fold.

Firstly, religion has proven over time to be all but impossible to completely wipe out. Organized religion in China has survived centuries of repression and monitoring by imperial dynasties and even survived the all-out frontal attack from the current regime during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. These experiences show to the CCP that an effort to completely remove religion would not be easy, and would require an immense amount of resources unlikely to compensate any perceived benefits of eliminating a potential rival.

Secondly, the ideology of Marxism leaves Chinese citizens with a spiritual and social vacuum. This ideology offers no explanation for those issues left unexplained by science, particularly issues regarding the afterlife. Marxism also fails to set out any moral code or standard of ethics. Furthermore, Marxism fails to provide citizens with a non-political sphere of social goods and services. Organized religions on the other hand, provide for all of these shortcomings of Marxism. Thus, allowing for the existence of organized religious groups helps compensate for some of the shortfalls of Marxism and meet the needs of the people. Meanwhile, closely controlling and monitoring organized religion allows the CCP to keep the influence and power of this potential rival in check, while at the same time providing the benefits of religion to its citizens and avoiding the costs required of directly attacking religion.

Territory

Perhaps the most relevant factor in recent years has been the desire of the Chinese Government to defend its territorial sovereignty. Recurrent references are made in official government rhetoric to defending territorial sovereignty. These references are most frequently made in regards to Taiwan and Tibet. The Chinese Government still views

Taiwan as an inalienable part of China, currently considered as a renegade province which needs to be restored to its proper place. Restoring Taiwan to the mainland is a top priority for the CCP, and has become the defining issue of patriotism for most Chinese people. The recent takeovers of Hong Kong (1997) and Macau (1999) and the one country two systems policy implemented in those regions were all a model for the anticipated restoration of Taiwan.

One of the main arguments offered by the CCP to defend their position of Taiwan being a part of China is history. The CCP claims that historically Taiwan has been a part of China and today is still a part of China. The CCP relies on the same argument to justify its possession of Tibet and the province of Xinjiang. Both of these provinces, just as Taiwan, have a complex history consisting of periods with independence, periods of Chinese rule, and even periods of foreign rule. Similarly, today there are strong domestic and international movements pushing for independence from Chinese rule in all three of these areas. Hence, for the Chinese Government the status of Xinjiang and Tibet are closely linked to the status of Taiwan. In the mind of the CCP maintaining governance over these two provinces is essential to eventually achieving reunification with Taiwan.

As covered in Section 1, the independence movements in Xinjiang and Tibet are both intimately related to religion—Islam in Xinjiang, Buddhism in Tibet. Consequently, controlling and monitoring religion in these two areas is a priority for the CCP in order to carry out its reunification policy with Taiwan.

War on Terror

The United States War on Terror began in 2001 has given the Chinese great leverage in dealing with its separatist movements, particularly Muslim based movements

in Xinjiang such as the ETIM. Since that time the Chinese government has changed its rhetoric from addressing these groups as separatists to being terrorists. They have claimed Uighur activists have ties with Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and other internationally recognized terrorists groups. Despite a lack of evidence for such ties, the Chinese have used their leverage with the United States to get these groups officially recognized as terrorist organizations. This has enabled the Chinese government to expand suppression of these groups under the pretext of suppressing terrorism.

Political Restraints

Another highly relevant political factor influencing the Chinese government's management of religious affairs is international trade and politics. China's economic growth over the past several decades has turned it into the world's number one consumer with a dire need for natural resources, especially oil. Since 1991 China has been a net importer of oil. As more than 58% of China's oil imports are Middle Eastern and primarily Muslim nations, China's access to oil supplies is contingent upon positive relationships with its Muslim trading partners.⁶¹ Mistreatment of their Muslim brethren in China by the Chinese government could alienate these trading partners, and jeopardize China's access to strategic oil supplies. Accordingly, China's treatment of Xinjiang and its Muslim population has a large impact on its trading relationship with Muslim countries.

At the same time, China's hands are not completely tied. The success of China's textiles and manufacturing coupled with weapon sales in the Middle East also makes these trading partners heavily reliant upon China. China's growing political power and viability as an alternative investor and trading partner to the recently unpopular United

States also boosts its leeway in the Middle East. Thus, the Chinese government is still able to exert a tight hand of control over Xinjiang and its Muslim population, yet is restrained from going too extreme.

The process of globalization over the past century has caused the economies of almost every single nation to be intertwined. As the world's largest consumer and exporter, China's economy is heavily reliant upon other nations. Maintaining good trade relations with its main trading partners the United States, Europe, and Japan is a must. The United States and Europe both possess large Christian populations who are very concerned with the status of religious freedom in China. This economic relationship adds political pressure to China not to take their controls on religion to too great of an extreme as to anger their trading partners and invoke a negative impact on their trading relationship.

In recent years China has gradually ascended the international stage and now finds itself at the center of international spotlight as it prepares to host the 2008 Olympic Games. In 2001 after 15 years of negotiations and preparations China joined the World Trade Organization. Earlier that same year Beijing was selected to host the 2008 Olympics. Acquiring these two bids required several promises from the Chinese Government to conform to international norms and improve its human rights record. The past several months leading to the Olympics have brought about numerous protests against the Chinese Government for its dealings with Tibet, Darfur, Burma, and human rights in general. This international spotlight adds tremendous pressure to the Chinese Government to ease controls over religion and improve ties with the largely Muslim inhabited Xinjiang region and Tibetan Buddhist inhabited Tibet.

Section 4

Conclusion

Putting it all together

Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam have all directly contributed to and significantly influenced multiple rebellions against different Chinese governments throughout history. These religious inspired rebellions have challenged, weakened, and in some cases even overthrown almost every dynasty in China's long dynastic history. In response Chinese Governments have become wary of religion, seeking to effectively monitor and control it, with some regimes even unsuccessfully seeking to completely banish religion. In turn, this has made religion even more resistant and self-willed, further contributing to the unstable relationship between government and religion in China.

Accordingly, given such a history, over time religion has obtained a reputation and an association with rebellion and disruption. This is especially true of Christianity, mostly due to its connection with western imperialism during the most humiliating and unstable period of Chinese history during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Buddhism has escaped this association with rebellion, with the significant exception of Tibet.

Independence movements in this region are thoroughly linked with Tibetan Buddhism, thus the Chinese Government also associates Tibetan Buddhism with rebellion and disruption.

The case is rather similar for Islam. As with Buddhism, Islam is not viewed by the CCP as a significant threat with the exception of its association with independence movements. As the official religion of the minority people groups in Xinjiang province

desiring independence from China, Islam too been linked to rebellion and disruption by the Chinese Government.

This history of religious rebellion coupled with the role of religion in modern independence movements gives the CCP ample reason to fear religion. This fear combined with current political factors further reinforce the perceived need to control and monitor religion. The CCP's political monopoly and desire to preserve this monopoly factored in with its reunification aims with Taiwan and the subsequent importance of defending its territorial borders both present strong motives for keeping religion contained. The U.S. war against terrorism as well as China's economic might and position at the heart of the global economy provide China with needed leverage for carrying out such controls in the face of international criticism.

While in some ways further reinforcing the CCP's perceived need to control religion, in other ways modern political factors serve to counteract Chinese Government control over religion and pressure the government to ease such controls. The importance of maintaining a good relationship with its trading partners, participating in global organizations such as the WTO, and achieving a positive reputation in the global press all pressure the Chinese Government to conform to international norms and standards. Hosting the 2008 Summer Olympic Games has brought China into the spotlight of international media coverage and is bringing unprecedented pressure to respect human rights and ease controls on religion.

Comparison

The government's policies towards these three global religions contain many similarities as well as discrepancies. Of course the official public policies towards each

religion are the same. All three of these religions must be registered and approved by the government in order to be considered permissible and protected by law. Once registered, they are overseen by the government's Religious Affairs Bureau and organized into a "Patriotic Organization" directly responsible for all of their affairs. Officials in the Religious Affairs Bureau are given complete control over every aspect of the religious activities of these religions. Their control extends into the conduction of religious services, doctrinal beliefs held and taught, the publication and distribution of materials for worship and training, and interaction with foreigners. While these overall official policies are the same for every religion the actual application and enforcement differs greatly with each religion.

A major divergence can be seen in the government's enforcement of policy against unregistered religious activity. Unregistered activity by Buddhists is highly tolerated and practically neglected by the Chinese government. Unregistered activity by Christians, however, is highly sought out and persecuted in many regions (although tolerated more so in others) of China. In major cities, particularly politically sensitive locations such as Beijing and Shanghai, Christian "underground churches" or unregistered meetings are actively hunted by the government and occasionally nationwide campaigns are conducted to crack down on unregistered meetings. Unregistered Islamic meetings are also highly sought out by the CCP as they are suspected of being affiliated with independence movements. Of course, the same goes for unregistered Buddhist activities in Tibet as well.

A discrepancy in the enforcement of policy regulating religious interaction with foreigners is also observable. In this aspect as well Christians are more heavily monitored

than other religions. Foreign Christians are heavily discouraged from interacting with the Chinese people and their involvement in registered churches is extremely restricted. Funding from overseas Christians is also strongly discouraged by the government. Buddhism in contrast is enthusiastically promoted by the government in international relationships. Buddhist foreign exchanges, particularly with Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian countries, are encouraged and used by the CCP to improve political ties with its Asian neighbors.⁶² Islam too is used by the Chinese Government to build international bridges. Exchanges with Muslims from other nations are promoted as the CCP attempts to use its Muslim population to help promote relations with Muslim countries.

Once more, these favorable and relaxed policies towards Buddhism and Islam are in general terms, to the exclusion of Tibet and Xinjiang. In these two regions interactions with foreigners are tightly restricted and heavily scrutinized by the CCP. In fact, in these two regions more extreme measures of monitoring interaction with foreigners are taken by strict controls over foreign media access to the region and stringent restrictions on foreign tourism in these two provinces.

Restrictions on printed religious material tell a similar story. Christian literature is tightly controlled and great efforts are made by the CCP to ban and prevent the access to and distribution of foreign Christian literature. Buddhist and Islamic literature are largely left untouched except in Tibet and Xinjiang. In these two regions religious material is screened and monitored with great care.

Government policy on the indoctrination of children tells a very unique story. In this case Islam receives the greatest restrictions of the three religions. As Islam is

characteristically a biological religion being passed on from parents to children as opposed to through evangelization, the government seems to be rigorously banning the indoctrination of children by Muslims in an attempt to reduce the population of Muslims in Xinjiang (and thus reduce the population of those in favor of independence from China). The indoctrination of children by Christians while also banned is unevenly enforced. Some government churches allow and even encourage children to attend church services, with some churches providing special services and weekly activities for children. Other government churches strictly enforce the government's policy and do not even allow children on church property. The indoctrination of children by Buddhists is a non-issue given little to no attention by the government.

The role of the government in the appointment of religious leadership as well as the government's interference with religious doctrine yet again demonstrate tight government supervision of Christianity, Buddhism in Tibet, in addition to Islam in Xinjiang. The government not only decides appointments to the Religious Affairs Bureau, but actually makes leadership appointments at every level for Christianity even down to the local church level. Appointments are often based on candidates' support for the party and willingness to carry out party policy as opposed to making appointments based on religious considerations.

Buddhists are given more freedom in choosing their own leadership outside of Tibet. In Tibet the CCP is highly involved in the selection process of Buddhist leaders, including the selection of Tibetan Buddhism's leadership—the Dalai and Panchen Lamas. In Xinjiang the CCP actively interferes with the leadership selection process and

works to ensure the appointment of non-radical leaders who oppose independence movements and associations with radical foreign Muslim fundamentalist groups.

Aside from these official policies which are enforced in different manners with each religion are the unofficial policies. Unofficially, Buddhism, again with the clear exception of Tibetan Buddhism (which is intensely monitored by the government and currently the greatest concern for the CCP), seems to be the most favored by the government, very lightly monitored, given highly favorable treatment, and promoted as a traditional Chinese religion.

Christianity on the other hand, is unofficially treated by the CCP as a major rival and thus zealously attacked. The political nature of Christianity, its high level of organization, its strong philosophy, and the loyalty which it commands are all highly feared by the CCP. It appears to be portrayed by the government as a very “un-Chinese” and politically motivated, dangerous religion. Of the three religions, when not-considering the independence issues in Tibet and Xinjiang, Christianity is by far the most closely monitored and persecuted by the Chinese Government.

Islam, much like Christianity is highly monitored by the Chinese Government. In contrast to Christianity, however, the persecution of Islam is based on its association with independence movements in Xinjiang. This association with independence movements has led to the enactment of extreme government scrutiny over Islam in Xinjiang province and a whole campaign aimed at decreasing Islam’s influence in the region. Aside from concerns with the independence movements in Xinjiang, Islam seems to be portrayed as an ethnic religion reserved for minority groups in China. It is seen as a tool by the

Chinese government to improve relations with Islamic trading partners and especially to secure much needed natural resources, namely oil.

Comparing the discrepancies in the Chinese Government's policies towards each religion indicates that the policies differ based on the perceived threat from each religion to the CCP and the perceived need to balance that threat. For instance, Buddhism is normally not viewed as a challenge or any sort of threat to the CCP. Thus, policies towards Buddhism are highly favorable and control mechanisms are very relaxed. Conversely, when Buddhism becomes associated with independence movements in Tibet and threatens the CCP's control over that region the policies become strikingly more repressive. The same can be said of Islam which is normally not deemed as a threat to the CCP. Yet, due to Islam's associations with threatening independence movements in Xinjiang the CCP has governed Islam in this region with a heavy hand. Meanwhile, Christianity is considered to be very threatening by the CCP and this fear is clearly reflected by the strong enforcement of tight control and monitoring policies.

In conclusion, the interaction between religion and government in China is truly unique and complex. The relationship of three global religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—in this country with the Chinese Government are all very different. An understanding of the history of the relationship between religion and government in China combined with an understanding of the relevant political factors to this relationship provide an explanation for the current state of affairs.

¹ Catholicism is often labeled as a branch of Christianity by most Western scholars. Conversely in China it is separated and labeled as a separate religion. Regardless of how it is labeled Catholicism is easily identifiable from Protestant Christians and is certainly very global. Yet it has not been included in this paper. Most of the political issues relevant to this paper would be the same for Catholicism as for Protestant Christianity in China. However, the relationship between the Vatican and the Chinese Government and the controversy surrounding the selection of Chinese bishops are very unique political issues. Due to the vastness of this issue and the in-depth attention these issues would require, the coverage of Catholicism is out of the scope of this paper and has thus been excluded.

² State Administration for Religious Affairs of P.R.C. <<http://www.sara.gov.cn/GB/zgzj/>> March 21, 2008.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Kindopp, Jason and Hamrin, Carol Lee. *God and Caesar in China*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004, p. 3.

⁵ Ling, Haicheng. *Buddhism in China*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004, pp.1-14.

⁶ Meaning of the five official religions Daoism is the only one that can truly be considered indigenous or native to China.

⁷ Roberts, J.A.G. *A History of China: Second Edition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.44-46.

⁸ Ling, Haicheng. *Buddhism in China*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004, pp.184-185.

⁹ Roberts, J.A.G. *A History of China: Second Edition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.71-72.

¹⁰ Overmyer, Daniel L. "The China Quarterly Special Issues, New Series, No.3." *Religion in China Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 136-139.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 123.

¹² Visit china.org and search for "Dalai Lama." View the archived articles which appear. <<http://search1.china.com.cn/hlftiweb/search.jsp>> April 30, 2008.

¹³ BBC News World: Asia-Pacific. "Panchen Lama returns to Tibet." June 18, 1999. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/372270.stm>> March 21, 2008.

¹⁴ Visit china.org and search for "Dalai Lama, Olympics." View the archived articles which appear. <<http://search1.china.com.cn/hlftiweb/search.jsp>> April 30, 2008.

¹⁵ When considered as a percentage of the overall Chinese population, however, it is clear that Christians are a small minority in China.

¹⁶ Lambert, Tony. *China's Christian Millions*. Oxford: OMF, 2006, p. 19.

¹⁷ CIA World Factbook

¹⁸ Latourette, Kenneth Scott. "Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, Vol. 152, Nov, 1930." *Christianity in China*. China: Sage Publications, Inc. in association with the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1930, pp. 63-71. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1016539>> March 30, 2008.

¹⁹ Kindopp, Jason and Hamrin, Carol Lee. *God and Caesar in China*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004, p. 35.

²⁰ Kindopp, Jason and Hamrin, Carol Lee. *God and Caesar in China*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004, p. 35.

²¹ Aikman, David. *Jesus in Beijing*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2003, p. 176.

²² Kindopp, Jason and Hamrin, Carol Lee. *God and Caesar in China*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004, p. 9.

²³ ChinaToday.com. *Communist Party of China*. <<http://www.chinatoday.com/org/cpc/>>. April 30, 2008.

²⁴ "Regulations for the Management of Religious Activities in Qinghai Province," article 10, p. 85; see also "Provincial Regulations for the Registration and Management of Places of Religious Activity in Fujian," *Chinese Law and Government*, vol. 33 (May-June 2000), pp. 30-33.

²⁵ Example: a Three-Self Church in Chengdu, Sichuan Province which had a rotating speaker arrangement in which one of the speakers was a government appointed non-Christian. The local congregation complained to the Religious Affairs Bureau and many congregants boycotted the meetings over which this individual presided, to no avail. (Interview in Chengdu, Sichuan Province with local church members January 9, 2008)

²⁶ Of the eight "house churches" I visited in China four of them were held in the homes of one of the congregants, the other four were held in apartments or hotel conference rooms rented out by the congregation solely for the purpose of holding meetings.

- ²⁷ Based on visits to house churches and interviews with congregants in Beijing, Changchun, Chengdu, Harbin, and Shanghai (May 2006-May 2008).
- ²⁸ Interviews with underground Church leaders in Chengdu on January 9, 2008 and in Beijing on March 15, 2008.
- ²⁹ State Administration for Religious Affairs of P.R.C. <<http://www.sara.gov.cn/GB/zgzj/>> March 21, 2008.
- ³⁰ Mi, Shoujiang and You, Jia, translated by Min, Chang. *Islam in China*. Beijing: China Continental Press, 2004, pp.13-23.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*, pp.43-44.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.43-65.
- ³⁵ Overmyer, Daniel L. "The China Quarterly Special Issues, New Series, No.3." *Religion in China Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 158.
- ³⁶ Mi, Shoujiang and You, Jia, translated by Min, Chang. *Islam in China*. Beijing: China Continental Press, 2004, pp.87-111.
- ³⁷ Gov.cn: Chinese Government's Official Web Portal. *China Factfile: Fifty-six ethnic groups*. <http://english.gov.cn/2006-02/08/content_182626.htm> April 30, 2008.
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- ⁴⁷ Roberts, J.A.G. *A History of China: Second Edition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.38.
- ⁴⁸ Aikman, David. *Jesus in Beijing*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2003, pp. 21-24.
- ⁴⁹ Roberts, J.A.G. *A History of China: Second Edition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.89.
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- ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.
- ⁵⁴ Kindopp, Jason and Hamrin, Carol Lee. *God and Caesar in China*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004, pp. 28-30.
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